

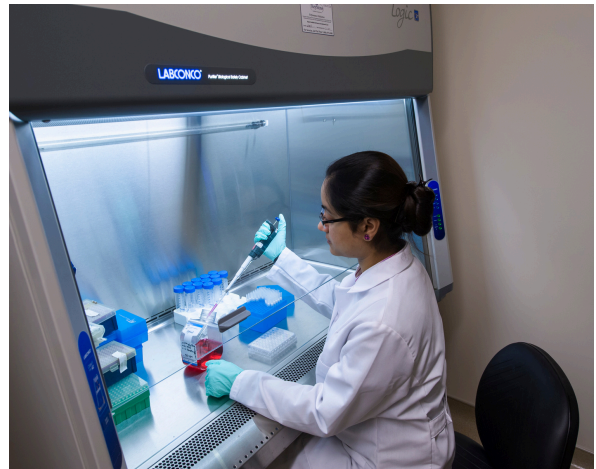


VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
**Collaborative Discourse Management
in Graduate Education**



VCU COMPACT BETWEEN GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR THESIS/DISSERTATION ADVISORS

A framework for aligning graduate student mentor-mentee relationships and mutual expectations



This document was developed using the following resources:

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Northwestern, The Graduate School, Guidance for Positive Graduate Student and Faculty Adviser Relationships

Michigan State University Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising (2022)

University of Nebraska Medical Center, Compact Between Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors (Dec 2022)

Texas A&M University Compact Between Graduate Students and Their Supervising Faculty (07/22/15)

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INTRODUCTION

The *VCU Compact Between Graduate Students and their Thesis/Dissertation Advisors* is an agreement that presents guiding principles intended to support the development of positive mentoring relationships between graduate students and their faculty advisors. A successful student-mentor relationship is a shared responsibility of the student, faculty mentor, graduate program, and institution. In the context of this document, advisor refers to a faculty member who guides a masters or doctoral student to completion of a thesis or dissertation. This document offers a set of broad expectations that are meant to initiate discussions about the student-mentor relationship, and should be part of regular and ongoing discussions between graduate students and their advisors. It is recommended that this compact is reviewed and signed upon the initial match of the student and advisor, is reviewed annually, and that the signed documents are collected by graduate programs.





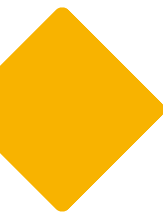
COMMITMENTS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS COMPLETING A THESIS/DISSERTATION

1. **I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility for the successful completion of my degree.** I will be committed to my graduate classes, research, and all other program activities. I will maintain high levels of professionalism, self-motivation, initiative, and ethical standards. I will be civil and respectful of my advisor, research group members, study participants, and all other members of the research community.
2. **I will meet regularly with my faculty advisor to provide updates and results of my coursework, research, and professional and career development activities.** I will be open and honest with my advisor and will seek help or resources if I find myself struggling in my research or courses.
3. **I will work with my faculty advisor to develop a thesis/dissertation project.** This will include establishing a timeline for each phase of my work. I will strive to meet the established goals and deadlines. I will make my advisor aware immediately of any timelines required by a sponsor.
4. **I will work with my faculty advisor to select a thesis/dissertation committee.** I will meet with this committee at least annually (or more frequently if recommended). I will discuss my progress and will evaluate and change my project plan, based on advice and constructive criticism from my committee.
5. **I will be a good citizen of my research group.** I agree to take part in shared research group responsibilities and will use resources carefully and frugally. I will contribute to an environment that is safe, equitable, and free of harassment.
6. **I will maintain detailed, organized, accessible and accurate research records.** I acknowledge that original notebooks, data, digital files, and tangible research materials belong to the institution and must be available to the lab. I will abide by all VCU research policies that affect graduate students.
7. **I will be knowledgeable of and will abide by the policies and requirements of my graduate program, graduate school, institution and sponsor.**
8. **I will discuss policies on work hours, academic demands, medical leave, and vacation with my graduate program and faculty advisor.** I will obtain permission from my advisor in advance of any planned absences, and inform my advisor as soon as possible of any unexpected absences due to illness or other issues. I will apprise my faculty advisor as soon as possible of any issues that would affect my academic progress.
9. **I will work with my advisor on applicable deadlines and to communicate/publish all relevant research results in a timely manner before completion of my degree requirements.**
10. **I will participate purposefully in meetings, seminars, and other professional development opportunities provided by my program.**
11. **I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility to develop my own career path.** I will develop my individual skills, values, and interests to achieve my desired career goals. I will seek resources for career guidance from my advisor, thesis/dissertation committee, career services, and other resources, as appropriate. I will actively identify, network with, and seek advice from those in careers of interest to me.

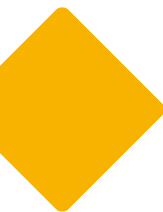


COMMITMENTS OF FACULTY ADVISORS OF THESIS/DISSERTATION STUDENTS

- 1. I will be supportive, equitable, accessible, encouraging, receptive, civil, and respectful of my graduate students.** It is my responsibility to cultivate a culture of acceptance among the entire research group. I will create an environment that is safe and free of harassment. I will be transparent and timely in delivering information about financial resources that are or are not available to support the student. I will abide by VCU policies that affect graduate students. I will actively participate in professional development opportunities to advance my cultural competence and mentoring skills.
- 2. I will be committed to meeting one-on-one with the student on a regular basis. I will regularly review the student's progress and provide timely feedback and goal-setting advice.** My written and oral feedback will be honest and be delivered in a civil and professional manner. I will grade the student fairly, accurately, and in a timely manner for their research credits. I will answer the student's emails in a timely manner. I will make my expectations for the student clear and put them in writing. If the student is under-performing in research, I will establish a written developmental plan to address this as soon as possible.
- 3. I will be committed to the graduate student's thesis/dissertation research endeavors.** I will work with the student to help plan and guide the research project, set reasonable and attainable goals, ensure fiscal feasibility of the work, and establish a timeline for completion. I will respect the student's time, prioritize degree completion, and make myself available for milestones such as the final defense.
- 4. I will assist the graduate student with the selection of a thesis/dissertation committee.** I will ensure that this committee meets at least annually (or as recommended by the program) to review and discuss the graduate student's progress and future directions. I will respect the ideas and suggestions of my colleagues on the committee. I will assist the graduate student in navigating any disagreements among the committee members.
- 5. I will refrain from requiring the graduate student to perform tasks that are unrelated to their own coursework, training, and professional development.**
- 6. I will discuss authorship policies regarding papers in advance with the graduate student.** I will acknowledge the graduate student's contributions to the work, and facilitate timely publication of the student's work.
- 7. I will be knowledgeable of and guide the graduate student through the requirements, deadlines, and, milestones of the graduate program and the institution.**
- 8. My expectations related to leaves of absence, including medical, family, and/or general leaves, as well as parental accommodation, will be in accordance with VCU policy, and will not be more stringent than those of the Program/School/College/University.** I will respect the student's need for time away from their research in order to work on their courses and other program requirements, such as qualifying exams, comprehensive exams, etc.
- 9. I will encourage the graduate student to attend and present their research at professional meetings and make an effort to secure funding for such activities.** I will provide networking opportunities for the student to discuss their research findings with fellow researchers.



10. **I will encourage the graduate student to obtain professional skills needed for a successful career, including oral and written communication, management and leadership, collaborative research, teaching, and mentoring.** I will also encourage the graduate student to seek professional development advice from other faculty and colleagues, professional organizations and available university resources, consistent with their individual development plan.
11. **I will create an environment in which the student can openly and regularly discuss academic matters and explore career opportunities and paths that match their skills, values, and interests, and be supportive of their career path choices.** I will provide advice and feedback on career goals, and actively assist the student in finding others who can help them explore careers. I will provide letters of recommendation for the student's next phase of professional development and will continue to provide support as the student moves forward in their career.
12. **If I will be on leave for an extended period of time, I will provide alternative supervision and advising for my graduate student.** If it becomes necessary for my student to change advisors for any reason, it is my responsibility to help cultivate a smooth transition for my student to another advisor.
13. **I will properly secure confidential material/data, if necessary keep in a safe location.**



Optional additional commitments specific to the Program and/or to the Advisor/Student:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

We acknowledge reading this document and we agree to the standards that it describes.

Student Name/Signature:

Program:

Date:

Faculty Advisor Name/Signature:

Department:

Date:



VCU

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